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WOULD WOMAN SUFFRAGE BENEFIT THE STATE, AND WOMAN HERSELF?

BY IDA HUSTED HARPER.

SUCH an arraignment of woman by a woman is seldom seen as appeared in the January NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW under the title, "Woman's Assumption of Sex Superiority," in which Mrs. Annie Nathan Meyer makes these surprising assertions:

"I fail to see in women any evidence of the character that is needed in public life;" "I challenge the assumption that women as a sex could contribute a regenerative force to the body politic;" "I am quite sure that, in the political arena, I should dread the advent of women as voters and office-holders a little more than that of the 'tiger.'"

The reasons given for this total lack of faith in women are briefly these: Character is the one force needed in American life to-day, and there is nothing in the life and work of women up to the present time to indicate that they possess this character; they have shirked or done badly the tasks allotted to them in the past; they have turned their backs on their own duties and reached forth to grasp the more spectacular work of others in the hope of public applause and reward; they have an increasing desire to belong to organizations and hold office, and they sometimes use unscrupulous methods; they have not been good mothers or there would not be so many "grafters" in politics and elsewhere; they have shirked the noblest duty on God's earth.

This last charge is somewhat obscure; but, as reference is made later on to "overriding nature," it evidently means that there are not so many children in the family as there used to be. There would be some difficulty, however, in utilizing this fact as proof that women could not cast a conscientious ballot or do effective public work. They would really have more time for the latter without neglecting home duties.

It must be recognized that the "grafters" of to-day, the men who are dishonest in politics, in business and in public and private life, are not the sons of the modern woman, with her clubs, her social functions and her alleged deterioration; but they are the product of those dear, old-fashioned mothers, who, to quote Mrs. Meyer, were distinguished for "daily uncomplaining attention to household details; tender, unseen care given to children; brooding over, watching and painstaking upbuilding of character." It would be an injustice and an insult, however, to hold the mothers responsible for the so-called "grafters." These are, on the contrary, the direct result of the environment and conditions which men find awaiting them as soon as they step outside the home and beyond the mother's personal influence. It is because women have seen again and again the powerlessness of mothers, that they are demanding a voice in shaping these conditions which now are able to counteract the purest and strongest of home influences.

It is unquestionably true that women show an increasing desire to belong to organizations, but this is largely because they have learned that any movement to succeed must have an organized force behind it. There are now over one hundred national associations of women in the United States, with thousands of auxiliaries and about 4,000,000 members. Without exception, their object and work are for the progress and uplift of mankind. When Mrs. Meyer expresses the hope that this organized effort may die out and that women may return to quiet, private "personal touch," she wishes in effect for the breaking up of the great missionary societies of women in all the churches; the W. C. T. U., which encircles the globe; the patriotic societies, of which the Woman's Relief Corps alone has raised \$2,500,000 and expended the money in the assistance of soldiers, their widows and orphans; the Collegiate Alumnae Association, with its splendid educational work; the Young Women's Christian Association, which every year reaches out its helping hands to over 50,000 girls and women. It would be impossible to estimate the loss to society if the vast organized work of women should come to an end.

There are, of course, instances where women develop a love for the lime-light of the platform, where they "scramble" for office, even where they use unscrupulous methods, but these instances are so few in the great body of women that they seem infinitesimal.

The organizations mentioned above, which have about 1,200,000 enrolled members, are practically free from any such accusations. The National Woman Suffrage Association has a perfectly clean record of thirty-five years. In most societies it is difficult to persuade women to hold the offices. When the facts are sifted, it will be found that two or three organizations, which fill a large place in the public eye, not because of their achievements but because they happen to be composed of fashionable women, are responsible for all the discredit which it has been attempted to fasten on women's organizations in general.

To say that "women have shirked or done badly their work in the past," is to impeach this work in the home, the church, the schools, the philanthropies; but in every one of these fields the charge is disproved by the facts. All are largely sustained by the capable work of women. From the days of the pioneers down to the present, the homes of the country owe just as much to women as to men, and in countless thousands of cases it is the women who have held the home and the family together. If it were not for the devoted and efficient service of women, the churches would perish. So well have they proved their capacity for teaching, that the public schools are passing into their hands. This is equally true of philanthropic effort; and, more and more, the charities, the reforms and the humanities of every kind are looking to women for their maintenance. It is because women have been faithful over few things that they are now being made rulers over so many.

"Have women done the work they found to be done, willingly, conscientiously, patiently, uncomplainingly?" asks Mrs. Meyer. "Have they been satisfied to do it without applause, without public reward? Have they brought to bear on this work the best they had, the best they could become?" Yes, a thousand times yes. The world is filled with such women. They are the enduring fibre of every community. They form the immense majority, and the exceptions attract so much attention simply because they are exceptions.

As unfounded as the others is the charge that "women have turned their backs on their own duties to grasp the more spectacular work of others." The peculiar industrial conditions of the present have done much to break up the individual home, but there has been no lessening of woman's innate love for home.

There never was a time when women were giving such careful, scientific study to domestic questions, striving to find a solution of the increasing problems, experimenting with new methods. learning food values, establishing training-schools for servants and attending cooking-classes themselves, investigating the whole range of household economics. The modern woman could enlighten her foremothers on many points of sanitation, plumbing, ventilation, diet, nursing and preventive measures against disease, of which those good women were in total ignorance. The homes of to-day are infinitely more beautiful, comfortable and healthful than those of olden times, while children are reared with greater intelligence, with just as much love and with more tenderness. For all these things, give woman her just credit.

The fact that several million women are employed in outside work does not necessarily mean that women have lost their taste for domestic industries. It simply means that they have been compelled to go after their work, which has been taken away from the home, and, as they cannot bring it back, they must stay with it. No more does it follow that women who are not wage-earners have lost their love of home because they have gone so largely into public activities. This is made possible because families are smaller, and because a great proportion of the work which they used to do within the household is now done outside of it by other women *and by men*, thus leaving them a considerable amount of leisure which they can employ in other duties. Without any desire to be unpleasantly personal, and solely to emphasize this point, it may be said that, for these reasons, the author of the article which we are now considering has been able to write several books, to belong to various clubs and societies, to act as trustee of a college, to speak many times from the public platform, and to serve on boards and committees. No one is justified in assuming that women engage in any of such activities "in the hope of public applause." They may, and doubtless do, have a nobler motive.

In attempting to disprove any superiority on the part of women, Mrs. Meyer says in effect that, if women had lived for centuries in the same freedom and under the same temptations as men, they might not be any better morally. But since they have not so lived for centuries, even if there is no better reason for it, it will have to be admitted that they do represent a much larger

proportion of morality than do men. The assertion that "the use of stimulants among women is increasing rapidly," is one which is often recklessly made, but it does not seem to be supported by anything beyond personal opinions. The charge has been vigorously denied by authorities just as good as those who have made it. Even if it be true, the number of intemperate women is still immeasurably less than the number who are strictly temperate, and instead of being an argument against admitting women to the suffrage it is the strongest one that could be made in favor of it. Give them a chance to check the evil of intemperance, which men cannot or will not do, before the time comes when women themselves may not have the inclination or the power to do so.

The entire article under discussion is based on an erroneous statement, viz.: "In the usual tone that pervades the speeches at a Woman's Rights Meeting, there is a degree of bitterness, of contempt, of positive enmity against men that is not dreamed of by the average person."

This archaic fallacy, it seems, has still some believers. The present writer, in a recent preparation of a history of the movement, had occasion to read every speech made at a National Woman Suffrage convention during the past twenty years, and not one possibly could be included in the above category. Portions of 340 of these addresses, by all the prominent speakers who attended these annual conventions during this score of years, are published in this volume, and also the resolutions adopted. He who will may read, and he will not find one paragraph expressing bitterness, contempt or enmity. It does not seem possible to offer any stronger refutation of this charge.

Is there, in fact, a "sex-superiority" which woman could bring to the electorate for the benefit of the State, and would the possession of the franchise improve or impair her character?

Since the early days of our Government, have any class of citizens ever been enfranchised in the belief that they would add to the voting body valuable and much-needed qualities? Were education, morality, temperance and a high degree of patriotism expected, when it was provided that every immigrant who landed on our shores should be equipped with the ballot? Was it because of these qualifications that several millions of plantation negroes were endowed with the suffrage? And is it because "character"

is so badly needed at the ballot-box, that the reservations are being scoured to round up the Indians at the polls? It is only when it is proposed to enfranchise women, that the whole nation becomes deeply solicitous as to whether they will bring to the sacredly guarded electorate those superior qualifications which always have been deemed so necessary.

The situation is the same in regard to the personal effect of the franchise. There never has been a doubt as to its advantage for men. The whole argument for so-called universal suffrage has been that it is the greatest force for developing self-respect, independence, a sense of responsibility—the highest manhood. But, when the conferring of this wonderful power on woman is advocated, the cry at once goes up, “Would it be advantageous to her? Would it not be detrimental to her womanhood?” Right protective of all other rights, supreme gift to man—but not good for women!

Many of the traits which are to be regretted in the women of the present, are the inevitable result of their receiving in a very brief space of time almost unlimited freedom, unaccompanied by that responsibility which should always be a balance wheel for liberty. In this, some of them are not unlike the children of to-day, who are fortunate in being spared the repression and severity of the past, but unfortunate in being released from any discipline whatever. Flattered by being called “queens,” they act on the principle that “the queen can do wrong;” and, assured that they are “angels,” they consider themselves not bound by the rules made for humans. Woman is a menace to society who has privileges without corresponding duties, who exercises a strong influence not steadied by responsibility for its effects. Such is very largely the position of woman, who now is an important factor in all the economic questions of the Government.

“Would it be to her advantage to possess the franchise?” “Would it not destroy the womanly instincts?” Instincts may be trusted to take care of themselves, and the idea of the “womanly” has been revised. The ideal woman of our grandfathers has passed into oblivion and has no part in the questions of to-day. Whatever may be one’s theories as to the proper sphere of women, present conditions demand that they shall be educated, self-reliant, trained in practical work, experienced in business methods, responsible for their actions. The broad-minded and far-seeing

will admit that girls now need virtually the same general preparation as boys to fit them for life. It is universally conceded that the ballot is the most valuable prerogative of citizenship, "the right which guarantees all others." How, then, could it fail to be of benefit to women? Where is the logic in educating them, training them for business, opening all avenues of employment, and then denying to them the most important means for the protection of their interests, on the ground that, being women, its possession would be of no advantage to them?

The suffrage is the great primary law-making power, and he who wields it has a direct influence over every law that is enacted. There is scarcely one of the laws which does not affect woman. The laws mete out to her the full penalty for crime; they levy, collect and expend her taxes; they prescribe the education of her children; they regulate the gas and water-supply; they control the streets and alleys; they dispose of the garbage and sewage; they inspect the food, its purity, weight and measure; they regulate the sale of cigarettes and obscene literature. The laws extend still further. They control absolutely the liquor traffic, the gambling-rooms, the houses of ill-repute; they decide the punishment for all crimes against women, and for ill-treatment and desertion of family; they provide for marriage, for divorce, for guardianship of children, for the buying, selling and division of property. Still further do they reach and govern the factory system, with its woman and child labor, the hospitals, the charitable and penal institutions.

But why attempt to enumerate? Women live, move and have their being from birth to death under the regulation of the laws, and who shall presume to question the advantage it would be to them to have a voice in electing the makers, and especially the administrators, of these laws? The laws, for the most part, are reasonably good; but their maladministration, particularly in our cities, makes municipal government in this country the byword of the civilized world. Would it not be to the benefit of woman, her home and family, if she had power to depose dishonest and incompetent officials? Until they have the franchise, women cannot serve on juries, nor sit in the Legislature, nor so much as attend a political convention and help nominate the men who are to fill every office in the State, from constable to Governor. Is this a disadvantage? It is so considered, to such an extent

that the privilege is not refused to any male citizen in the commonwealth, outside of the insane asylums and the penitentiaries.

The women of to-day are extending their housekeeping to the municipality, their motherhood to the children of the nation; and, banded in great organizations, they are striving to make the world better through many different lines of work. Whatever their object, it almost invariably brings them to the door of the city council, the State Legislature or the national Congress; and how do they come? Is it as constituents who put the members of these bodies in their exalted positions and can put them out at will, and who have a right to demand the enactment of their measures? Far from it. They approach humbly and timidly, expecting to be snubbed, and seldom disappointed in that expectation; presenting a petition which does not represent a single vote, and is received with contempt; grudged every minute of time given to them; their bill never presented by one of their own sex, and, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, buried in a pigeon-hole and never resurrected? Would it be to the advantage of women engaged in civic work to come before these legislative bodies as enfranchised citizens? Would it be to their advantage to fill some of the public offices themselves, and handle some of the public funds to which their taxes have contributed?

But there is still another class—the several million salary-earning and wage-earning women of the country. Would the suffrage be of benefit to them? This is evidently the opinion of the American Federation of Labor, one of the oldest, largest and most influential organizations of working-men in the country; for, at its national convention in Boston, a few months ago, it adopted the following resolution:

“Resolved, that the best interests of labor require the admission of women to full citizenship, as a matter of justice to them and as the necessary step toward insuring and raising the wages of all.”

The views of the International Typographical Union, one of the most conservative and perfectly organized bodies in existence, certainly are entitled to consideration, and at its last convention, in Washington, D. C., it passed this resolution:

“Recognizing that industrial evolution has driven women, in ever increasing numbers, into the trades and professions, until they constitute

a large percentage of the wage-earners of the country, we believe they should have the same right to vote as men, for the better defence of their industrial position."

Labor organizations generally hold these views, and theirs may be accepted as expert testimony. They understand what would be the helplessness of their own position without the tremendous power of the ballot, and they see the necessity of giving its protection to wage-earning women. At best, the weaker party in the struggle, women now endure all the hardships of working-men, with the added handicap of disfranchisement. Investigations of the United States Department of Labor in 1900 showed that, in seventy-five per cent. of the cases recorded, women received fifty per cent. less wages than men for the same work done with the same degree of efficiency. People may talk glibly of supply and demand, but the fact remains that disfranchised labor is cheapened labor, and not only degrades itself but drags down enfranchised labor. Working-men have secured their present position largely through the political force represented by their organizations, but to these the women are a constant menace. If admitted to the unions, they bring no voting strength; if excluded, they are used by employers to undermine wages. Disfranchisement means degradation in the business world, whether the victim be a Chinaman or a woman. The Chinese may be driven out of the country; women are here to stay, and they have entered the industries for all time. For the sake of self-preservation, as well as for the love of justice, men should hasten to invest them with the power to protect themselves and to cooperate in measures of mutual benefit.

To sum up briefly. Charles Sumner said:

"The ballot is the one thing needful, without which rights of testimony and all other rights will be as cobwebs. To him who has the ballot all other things shall be given. The ballot is like the horn of abundance, out of which overflow rights of every kind. Or, better still, it is like the hand of the body, and as the hand is, in the work of civilization, so is the ballot, in the work of Government. 'Give me the ballot and I can move the world.'"

Thus, all through the years from the beginning of this greatest experiment toward a republican form of government, the statesmen have continued to declare: "There is no freedom without the

ballot;" "the suffrage is the foundation of liberty;" "the vote is the citizen's emblem of sovereignty." By what process of reasoning can the conclusion be reached that, although the franchise is of paramount benefit to man, it would be of no advantage to woman? This could be done only on the theory that woman is already adequately represented by man. But James Otis, in defending the rights of the colonists, declared: "No such phrase as virtual representation is known in law or constitution; it is altogether a subtlety and illusion, wholly unfounded and absurd." It was not a speaker on the woman-suffrage platform of to-day, but Benjamin Franklin, a founder of our Government, who said: "They who have no voice nor vote in the electing of representatives do not enjoy liberty, but are absolutely enslaved to those who have votes and to their representatives."

Whether the suffrage would be a benefit to woman must be considered, not with reference to the women of the past, but with reference to those of the present and the future—women who are rapidly becoming equal factors with men in education, the industries and civic work of every nature. Even on the mothers of to-day is laid a heavier responsibility than ever was laid on mothers before, since they are being called to account for conditions outside the home, even while denied any direct power over these conditions. The eminent scientist, Huxley, said: "Admitting, for the sake of argument, that woman is the weaker, mentally and physically, for that very reason she should have the ballot, and every help which the world can give her." It is safer to possess the power of self-protection than to depend on even the wisest and best. Self-government means dignity, development, self-respect, self-reliance, judgment and courage. The possession of the franchise would make women stronger. In a report to Congress on this question Thomas B. Reed and other experienced members said: "We believe that every citizen in the United States is made more intelligent through his participation in politics and political campaigns." Women now have no incentive to study political questions, and either they present the melancholy spectacle of one-half the citizens without interest in affairs of Government, or, if they attempt to use their influence, it is without any responsibility for consequences. The minds of women could not fail to be broadened and strengthened by study and action on questions of tariff, currency, commerce, war, arbitration, ex-

tension of territory and others of national moment; and any education which fits them for the largest duties of life will be of equal value in limited and special work of whatever nature.

The Hon. George F. Edmunds said, in the United States Senate: "Disfranchisement is a cruel and degrading penalty, that ought not be inflicted except for crime." He had only men in mind; but how can anything be a degradation for a man and not for a woman? The training of children is placed almost exclusively in the hands of women—mothers and teachers; but how can the youth of the country receive with respect lessons in patriotism and public duty from those whom the Government has branded with dishonor? Men in the past have had a certain chivalry toward women because of their helplessness, dependence and many disadvantages in the struggle for existence. As these are passing away, this chivalry must be succeeded by something of a more substantial and enduring nature—the sincere and complete respect which one can give only to his equals or his superiors. But how is this possible, when, by the constitutions and the laws, woman is ranked with lunatics, imbeciles, felons, tribal Indians, Chinese and other unnaturalized immigrants?

It seems incredible that any one can give to this subject serious and intelligent study, putting aside sentiment and prejudice, and still ask the question, "Would the suffrage be a benefit to woman?"

In a so-called democratic and representative government, women citizens should have the franchise as an abstract right, guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence and the National Constitution. Since, however, in the case of women alone, of all the people, it has been deemed necessary to consider gravely for fifty years whether enfranchisement would not be injurious to them and detrimental to the State, let the argument proceed.

It will be admitted that the present Government is solely the work of men. Into it they have put their best and their worst. They have included in the electorate every masculine element and have no reserves. They have created a male oligarchy. Behold it! Is there a man in the United States entirely satisfied with it? Is there not a growing skepticism as to the value of a democracy? Are not the monarchies of the world taking fresh courage, when they view this republican experiment of over a century-and-a-quarter? We believe that our Government is founded upon correct principles. In what, then, consists the

weakness and the danger which cannot fail to be recognized? Among other causes are disregard for law, intemperance, dominance of the material over the spiritual, admiration for physical rather than moral force, immorality in high places, dishonesty in public life, brain power unrestrained by heart and conscience.

If there is not within our own nation an element capable of counteracting these tendencies, what hope is there for the salvation of the Government? And if in women is not found this essential constituent, where shall we look for it? Women form the only class that remains to be brought into the body politic. Until this has been done and the results thoroughly tested, the possibilities of a republic never can be known. Our founders had the true idea, but it has been only half-developed. It is a most erroneous belief that all the wisdom, judgment, common sense and other qualities necessary to carry on successfully a great government reside in one-half of the people.

It is true that women would bring also some undesirable qualities to the electorate, but the estimate of their influence must be based on the qualifications of the majority. Consider what it has received during the past thirty-five years from the majority of negroes, Indians and immigrants who have been enfranchised during that time, and then judge whether women, as a body, could not bring something to offset these last acquisitions. Those who fear the foreign and the colored vote should remember that there are more native-born women in the United States than foreign-born men and women; more white women than colored men and women. While there was in 1900 a slightly larger percentage of illiteracy among women than among men over twenty-one years of age, this included the very old women who had no facilities for education in their youth. But from ten to twenty years of age, there is a decided reversal of these figures, and the illiteracy is much less among girls than among boys. These figures and the statistics of the public schools show that more girls than boys are being educated, so that henceforth the enfranchisement of women would bring more education to the electorate than that of men.

The records of all the courts, police stations, jails and penitentiaries sustain the assertion that women are far more law-abiding than men. That they are much more temperate will not be denied, nor that they form a very small percentage of those who frequent gambling-rooms and brothels. Opponents of universal

suffrage urge that it would enfranchise the families of drinking, gambling, immoral men. True, but the great majority of these women would rejoice to vote against the institutions that are ruining their homes and disgracing their children. The church influence, with all that it stands for, would have three times its present representation, and the ministers could make their appeals to voters instead of to a disfranchised congregation. The public-school teachers would have nearly four times as many votes as now. Practically, no "tramp" or floating votes would be added. The last census showed 1,800,000 more men than women in the United States, and these naturally cannot vote as heads of families or represent the home. It will hardly be claimed that the best interests of home and children are as adequately represented at the polls as they would be if women had the franchise.

Conceding all that may be said as to the shortcomings of women, it still must be acknowledged that they are better prepared to exercise the suffrage than any class which ever has been admitted to the electorate. It has been said that "our Government is founded upon the broad principle, that the most effective government for mankind is not that which the wisest and best would select, but that which the average of mankind would select." Logically, then, to secure the most satisfactory results, woman must form a part of this average. Legislation and administration will thus represent two points of view, the man's and the woman's—the State and the Home—each absolutely dependent on the other. They will supply a needed balance in the Government, which cannot afford that any moral conviction shall lack utterance or any moral force be unemployed. To extravagance they will oppose economy; radicalism they will temper with conservatism; to physical they will add moral courage; masculine brain they will supplement with feminine heart, and the spirit of war they will vanquish with the spirit of peace. The questions of the future will be largely economic and social, and to the abstract and mechanical functions of the State in their settlement will be added woman's personal touch, sympathetic insight and self-sacrificing service. There must be strong cooperation, not alone among men, but also between men and women, to meet successfully the problems of the day, which, in their final analysis, are all political; and it is this cooperation which the women of the nation offer to the Government.

IDA HUSTED HARPER.